

RPG Reload File 062 – ‘Dragons Odyssey Frane’

[November 19, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we believe love can bloom between a cat and a human. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past and shine a little light on it to see how it's holding up. It's an opportunity to revisit old favorites, reflect on how they fit into the overall iOS RPG landscape, and to take a deeper dive than our reviews typically allow for. I do my best to present a balanced menu from week to week, but if you feel like I'm missing something important, don't stay quiet about it. Post in the comments below, drop in on the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#) to make a suggestion. I plan the schedule quite far in advance, so you probably won't see the game you mention soon, but it will go on the master list, I assure you.



Last week, we took a look at *9th Dawn* ([\\$2.99](#)), a nifty western-style action RPG inspired by the classics of that sub-genre. This week, we're hopping to the other side of the pond by checking out *Dragons Odyssey Frane* ([\\$5.99](#)), a bizarre Japanese-style action RPG inspired largely by Falcom's wonderful *Ys* ([\\$4.99](#)) series. *Frane* released on iOS in May of 2012, but it's actually a much older game. It's the third installment in a PC series created and published by EXE Create, a developer most well-known among mobile gamers for the *Across Age* and *Alphadia* ([\\$3.99](#)) games. At one time, the *Frane* series was the developer's bread and butter, so it's perhaps no surprise that *Dragons Odyssey* appears to have more lavish production values than the usual fare from EXE-Create.

As I've already profiled the history of EXE-Create in [RPG Reload File 033 – 'Across Age'](#), I'll simply summarize here. Founded in Osaka in 1997 by ex-IREM employees, EXE-Create started off by doing software support for the SEGA Saturn. Among their first few game projects was a SEGA Saturn collection of games from the legendary Japanese developer Falcom, most famous among western gamers for *Ys* and *Trails In The Sky*. That collection included a version of *Ys 2*, and I suppose that EXE-Create liked it a lot,

because after the SEGA Saturn market died off, the developer got to work on their own Ys-inspired action-RPG for the PC. Titled *Lost Memory Of Angel Story Frane*, the game released on April 20th, 2000, less than a couple of months after the launch of Sony's PlayStation 2.



At the time, PC gamers in Japan could be broadly sorted into two groups. One group more or less subsisted on adult visual novels and adventure games, and were by far the largest PC gaming demographic in the country. Falcom fans mostly made up the second group. Even though the developer occasionally dabbled in console projects and frequently licensed third-party ports of their PC games, Falcom was first and often exclusively releasing their titles on PC. Thus, if you were looking to find success on PC, it was wise to either do similar games to whatever Falcom was doing or make adult games. I guess EXE-Create had had their fill of the latter on Saturn. *Frane* was moderately successful, and EXE-Create ended up making a series out of it. The sequel, which was creatively titled *Lost Memory Of Angel Story Frane 2*, released in December of 2001, and a third game, *Lost Memory Of Angel Story Frane 3*, came out in March of 2003. Like most Japanese PC games of the era, these were all Japan-exclusive releases with no original

plans of ever localizing them for other markets.

Many years later, in November of 2011, the third game got an English release under the title *The Lost Angelic Chronicles Of Frane: Dragon's Odyssey* courtesy of short-lived publisher OmegaTH. By then, EXE-Create had largely moved on to the mobile market in Japan, and had made their English debut with the 2010 release of *Across Age*. Perhaps bolstered by the worldwide success of that game and *Alphadia*, their collaboration with Kemco, EXE-Create decided to release an English iOS version of the third *Frane* game under the title *RPG Dragons Odyssey Frane*. Although it was rightfully hammered for its frankly terrible English voice acting, the overall response to the game was quite positive. The game received a few updates post-release. Notably, a few weeks after launch, the Japanese voice acting was added back in, with an option to choose between the two. The last update was in December of 2012, when support for 4-inch iPhone screens was added. None of the other *Frane* games have been ported to iOS, and given EXE-Create's pace of creating new games, I doubt they ever will be.



That said, while *Dragons Odyssey Frane* has some major connections to the

previous games in the form of returning characters and continued story threads, it stands well enough on its own. You might find yourself waiting for the other shoe to drop on a few characters that are introduced only to find them not doing much more than making a cameo appearance, and that's because they actually are cameos, but aside from that, things go smoothly enough. *Frane's* main claim to what little fame it has is in it having you take control of two characters at a time instead of just one. EXE-Create would build on this significantly in the *Across Age* games, but in this game, it translates out to you controlling the main hero while your invincible helper tags along. Oh, and in case you're wondering, Frane is the name of the heroine of the first game. It just ended up sticking, I suppose.

The plot in this game involves two servants of God, Kunah and Riel, sent on a mission from the big man himself to recover a runaway angel named Escude. Kunah and Riel aren't angels, however. They're dragons with the ability to take the form of young humans. You won't see the dragon side of them too often, but it comes into play in the final battle in a truly cool way. Having more or less just fallen out of heaven, Kunah and Riel are both a bit naive about the world and prone to behaving like children at times. Kunah is the plucky hero who has to please everyone by solving their problems, while Riel's a bit of a spitfire who tends to be fiercely protective of her trusting friend. They both have different combat abilities, and you'll probably need to take advantage of both if you want to win.



You mainly need to concern yourself with Kunah. He can only attack at melee range, and even his farthest-reaching weapon is pathetically short. When Kunah charges up his power meter by attacking enemies, he can launch a super attack that is good for clearing the screen or devastating bosses. His attacks also paint a target on enemies, which is useful for aiming Riel's magical shots. Kunah has a finite amount of life, so you need to be very careful about getting close to enemies, especially bosses. Riel is invulnerable, but as she takes damage, a meter fills. When it tops off, she flies into a rage, grabs Kunah, and bounces him off the edges of the screen. Kunah will do heavy damage to enemies when Riel lobbs him, but the cost is 10% of your hit points, so it's best to use that particular trick only in emergencies if you can help it. Using Riel effectively is vital to your success, as she is the only one who can safely attack from a distance, but you'll need to keep an eye on her MP if you're using anything other than her basic shots.

In practice, the monsters swarm in such great numbers that you'll probably need to clear them out using Kunah most of the time. He can equip one of three different weapons, and each of those weapons comes in one of two elements. If you use the wrong element against an enemy, you'll do almost

no damage. I think the idea is to equip Kunah with one element and Riel with the other and use the appropriate character for the situation, but as I've said, when the enemies come in great crowds, you'll need Kunah's direct attack capabilities. That means in certain areas you'll have to constantly open up the equipment screen and change your gear around, which is definitely a bit of busy work the game could do without.



On the other hand, unless you've got a very steady touch, the boss encounters are going to largely rely on Riel's shots. There are a few gimmick situations where you'll need to use Kunah's sword strikes, but the boss fights in *Frane* largely play out like the ones in *Ys 2*. That is to say, it's more like playing a shooting game than an action-RPG. Some of the enemy attacks even look like they've fallen right out of an arcade shoot-em-up. Taking another page from *Ys*, once you've entered a boss fight, you're not allowed to change your equipment or access your menu. You can set three items to a quick-use spot, but beyond that, you'll have to get by with your skills. The battles can be a bit intense, and I suspect quite a few players may never get past the first boss. Once you get the hang of how things work, however, it's certainly no more difficult than the fights found in the *Ys* games, even if the

controls aren't quite as good.

The game's dungeons also feature some light puzzle-solving, but compared to *Across Age*, they're very simple. You'll have to push a statue here, flip a switch there, get an item from this place and take it to that place, and so on. The puzzle areas feel weird since they're usually empty compared to the monster-congested sections that make up the rest of each dungeon, but it's good to have something to break up the virtual-button-mashing. To tell the truth, Kunah's running speed combined with just how crowded most areas are make the dungeon areas a little confusing at times, and the absurdly short range of his attacks make dealing with bunches of enemies equally bewildering and even somewhat frustrating.



Where the game does shine, in true EXE-Create fashion, is in its characters and dialogue. While everyone is assuredly a little bit tropey, the punched-up localization and EXE-Create's talent for balancing absurdity with gravity keeps things entertaining throughout. One minute, God is disguising himself as a large, conspicuous dresser in order to surprise his two servants, the next, a cat is grilling you on whether you desire love or money, followed by a

serious scene about death and loss. It's a little jarring at times, but the script is never dull. *Frane* even features a rudimentary relationship system where you can talk to certain characters and give them presents to improve the bond between the two of you. You'll get certain rewards and dialogues by doing so, but the ending is always the same, so it's not the big deal that it might be in other games with a similar system.

Most of the gifts you'll be giving come in the form of the character's favorite food. By talking to them, you'll get some hints about what they like to eat. Using the game's simple cooking system, you can combine two ingredients to make a new item. Most of the hints characters give will involve a couple of different foods, so it's up to you to make the leap in logic. The game also features a crafting system that works in a similar fashion. In my opinion, neither the cooking nor the crafting are essential, and they're not all that well-integrated, but having extra things to do is interesting, I suppose. Both of those activities are done at your house, which seems to attract all sorts of cameo appearances from prior games. Many of them will set up houses of their own nearby, and you'll soon have a little town going. Again, this isn't a major part of the game and as such is quite basic, but as an extra, it's fun to watch out for.



Dragons Odyssey Frane is fairly long for the sort of game that it is, running almost 15 hours on an initial playthrough. I wish I could say the whole game is exciting, but the experience sometimes feels like dungeon slogs with the bosses serving as high points. The story and dialogue are enjoyable enough to keep you moving forward, but *Frane* suffers from pacing issues in a way that *Ys* rarely does. Most of that falls on the shoulders of the weak combat mechanics and the bizarre choice to over-stuff dungeons with enemies. It sometimes feels like you're just jamming the button hoping to get your next super attack and level-up before your life whittles down to nothing. The fact that you can only save at set points makes this even more annoying, as death means at least a little backtracking in most situations. Dying against a boss is the worst since you'll have to repeat the entire pre-boss cut-scene every single time. This game needs a skip button, badly.

I can't help but having some affection for this game, though. Maybe it's my considerable love for *Ys* shining a little extra sunlight on the experience, or maybe it's my appreciation of games that don't take themselves too seriously, but something about *Frane* makes it a lot of fun for me in spite of its many clear faults. As I noted in the **Reload** about *Across Age*, it's not like

there are a whole ton of action-RPGs without some sort of IAP system available on iOS these days, and although the Ys series has started to make its way to iOS since I said that, I think *Frane* still holds a valuable place in the App Store line-up. It's also quite reasonably priced these days compared to when it first launched. *Frane* mostly carries itself on its goofy charm, but in these modern days where gaming humor seems to be centered around memes and references, it's nice to have something that is just earnestly funny in a stupid sort of way.



That's just my take on *Dragons Odyssey Frane*, though. What do you all think? I want to know, so please comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). We'll be recording the next episode of the **RPG Reload Podcast** at the end of this month, so make sure to send any questions you might want answered to our mailbag at rpgreloadpodcast@gmail.com, too. As for me, I'll be back next week with another RPG. Thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload: *Heroes Of Steel Elite* ([\\$3.99](#)).